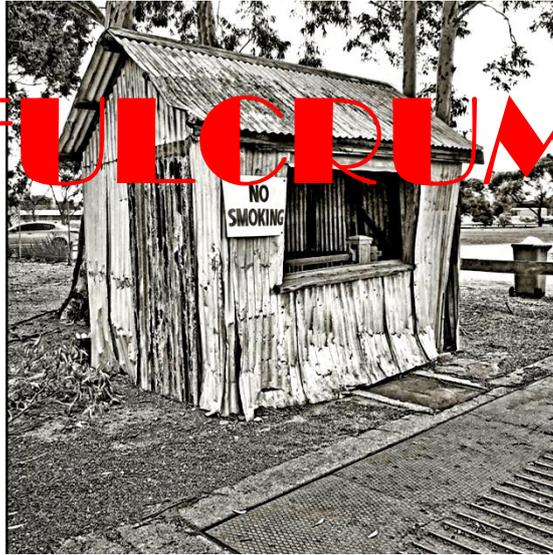


FULCRUM



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When they ring those golden bells



This nondescript 1950's pile with a winsome nod to the art deco, stands in an industrial street, a mere spit from the Fish Docks in Grimsby on the River Humber. It is now, as can be seen a 'Medi-Train Centre' (me neither!) but for some forty years it was the town's Weights and Measures Office (later Trading Standards) and it was the place where I once worked. When the office was built, Grimsby was a County Borough that stood proudly aloof from the surrounding County of Lincolnshire (Parts of Lindsey) as a separate Authority that managed all its own services, including the police force up until the 1960's. Closely conjoined, is the seaside town of Cleethorpes which was within the aforementioned County of Lincolnshire (Parts of Lindsey). It was once a regular

occurrence on a Saturday night after pub closing time, for Grimsby Borough police officers to be seen pushing confused drunks over Park Street into Cleethorpes for the County Police to deal with. This was of course reciprocated by the County officers who were equally loath to do the paper work.

The large bay window just inside the gates of the erstwhile Weights and Measures Office is where the weighbridge operator once sat. The plate of the weighbridge was just inside the gate and was extensively used by traffic coming from the docks laden with various fishy cargoes. This little weighbridge was fine for the 1950's but by the 1970's lorries were becoming too long and heavy for the modest weighing plate. By this time the proud County Borough had been subsumed into the infamous County of Humberside much disliked by both the residents of Lincolnshire and those of the East Riding of Yorkshire which that doomed entity vainly sought to unite. Those who devised the county of Humberside clearly had no concept of the age old enmity between the South and North banks of the Humber which emanated largely from the rivalries found within the fishing activities of Grimsby and Hull. The new Authority was however able to invest in a more modern weighbridge just behind the office building with a massive weighing capacity of 50 tonnes and a plate, a full 60 ft long so as to encompass all road vehicles of the day.

It was a modern design without the traditional iron frame from which shackles, carrying the main lever bearings, were normally suspended. In this new pattern the levers were pivoted on pillars fixed to the base of the pit and moreover, this machine, because of its greater length, had eight such lever bearings instead of the traditional four.

The bottom works of weighbridges generally lead a hard life as various types of road dirt and detritus are washed down into the pit and liberally coat the metal bits. As previously mentioned, the principal users of this weighbridge were businesses based on the nearby fish docks. In particular, lorries regularly brought copious amounts of fish offal and waste to be weighed. This material was scavenged from the fish processing houses on the docks, which were then legion. It may be wondered why there was such a trade in fish waste but it was in fact a valuable commodity. Some went to the local Fish Meal factory where it was made into farm animal feed but the vast majority was heading for a large factory in the East Midlands where the stinky stuff was transmogrified into delicious food for pampered pussy cats. The fish waste was dispatched in a wet condition and so each of the lorries left a snail trail of dripping slime all along the A46 from Grimsby to Melton Mowbray. It unfortunately followed that as each lorry stood on the plate to be weighed a goodly measure of this foul liquor fell onto the weighbridge and dribbled down into the pit. There was a drain but it had a limited ability to effectively remove all of the smelly liquid. Thus, the interior of the cabin was not a pleasant place to be, as the foul odours wafted up from the pit. Only a particularly hardened species of weighman would stay the course!

Not only was it offensive to the nostrils but the fish slime and salt water soup was particularly corrosive to the levers and bearings down in the pit and after a few years it became apparent that the bits down under were in need of repair. It thus became necessary to lift the substantial 60ft iron plate in order to lower a hapless engineer into the foetid depths.

Thus on the appointed day a mobile crane came chugging up the road to carry out the great reveal with a somewhat anxious weighing machine engineer standing by. The crane operator descended from his cab and surveyed the scene. He was slightly taken aback by the size of the plate and began estimating the weight of the lift, the angle of the jib etc. He decided it was doable with the proviso that it 'might be a bit of a bell ringer' as a reference to the alarms that were set off in the cab when an overload situation approached. In the event the plate was removed without any actual disaster and placed on the ground beside the pit. The renovation was then successfully carried out and the weighbridge was able to continue in use for a number of years. In the 1990's however, there was yet another Local Authority reorganisation and the reviled County of Humberside was dispatched. Various new Unitary Authorities replaced it and in the Grimsby area we now had North East Lincolnshire. This satisfied those locals who longed for the return of the 'L' word to their locality but it did finally put an end to the last vestiges of the old County Borough. The town was now simply part of an amorphous mass along with Cleethorpes, Immingham and a miscellany of surrounding villages. The old County Borough boundary signs had been obdurately if illicitly retained throughout the Humberside years but now they had to be finally replaced with something more truthful. The new Authority decided that they no longer needed a smelly weighbridge and it was sold off for scrap in the late 1990's. The metal was carted off to the scrap yard, the pit was filled in and a Chinese restaurant was built on the site. I never visited the restaurant but I do wonder if the Chow Mien arrived with a ghostly, lingering hint of decomposing halibut. As a final severing with the earlier regimes, the office itself was sold off in the early 2000's and the service was moved into a ghastly municipal tower block.

Go bring to me a pint o wine !

The UK Government, in its wisdom (sic) has decided that we should return to the glory days of Empire and reintroduce the Imperial System of weights and measures. In addition we are to see the reintroduction of the UK crown mark on pint measures in pubs. These are but some of the glorious fruits to be plucked from the fecund Brexit tree. In reality of course these outcomes will be somewhat less than trumpeted. Unless, of course, I've totally misunderstood and there is actually some bonkers scheme afoot to drive, with puritan zeal, the entire metric system into the English (Yes English!) Channel. It is likely that the 'reintroduction' will simply entail that over the counter goods can 'once again' be requested in imperial quantities. I bring news! This already happens! Retailers deal with reality and are well used to converting customers' imperial requests into metric values and delivering the requisite quantity. The goods are of course weighed on their kilogram scales, which will remain, along with petrol pumps

denominated in litres and carpets sold by the square metre. Beer, however will continue to be sold in pints as will (some) bottles of milk, ie those not sold in litres. Some packs of coffee will be half pounds (227g) and others will be 250g so as not to confuse anybody. Dealers in precious metals will offer to buy gold and silver in ounces, meaning of course the Troy ounce (31.1 g and still legal despite being largely unknown) instead of the avoirdupois ounce (28.35 g). Lengths of wood from B&Q will be in traditional imperial sizes, thinly disguised as metric quantities and low bridges will be marked in feet just to confuse foreign lorry drivers. I think the UK has enough metrological nonsense going on at the moment without adding to it.

As regards the great imperial crown on the beer glasses this, again is merely an inevitable consequence of our disentanglement from the EU, rather than some great jingoistic gesture to twist the nose of Johnny Foreigner (as many would prefer). We clearly no longer need to slap the EU common control marks on our domestic liquid serving measures so the pre-existing crown mark is the obvious replacement. Manufacturers may, of course want to continue trading with the EU and might therefore wish to use the common control marks as a producer in a third party state. This is unlikely to involve pint measures!

One imperial delight we are to expect is apparently a pint bottle of champagne, just for the British! Quite why the British want champagne in a size of container that lies tantalisingly between the existing half bottle of 37cl and the Bottle of 75cl is unclear. If however, a substantial UK wine merchant should decide that 56.8cl of bubbly is just what the market cries out for; and if Messrs.Veuve-Cliquot et al can be persuaded to have heavy, expensive glass bottles made in this irregular size for export, I see no problem! We are after all, on really good terms with the French these days. One issue that will have to be addressed is the name that will be given to this new size of container. At the moment champagne is supplied in a number of containers of various sizes ranging from a tiny quarter bottle all the way up to a ludicrous 40 bottle (30L) size called a Melchizedek. This latter behemoth will weigh as much as a sack of coal and is unlikely to be found on the shelves of 'Bargain Booze'. In between, there are various bottle sizes with interesting and exotic sounding names. Some are of Biblical origin being the names

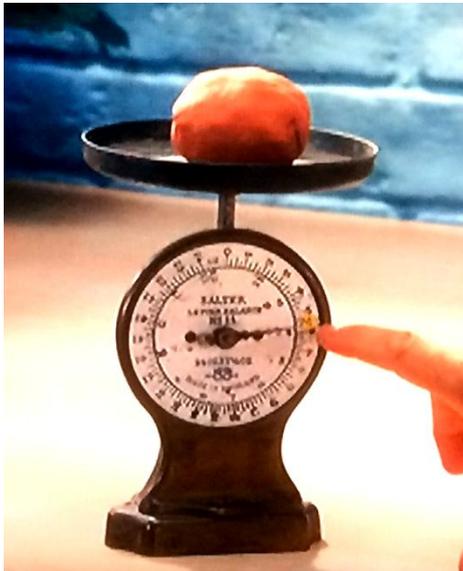


of Kings, Patriarchs etc from the Old Testament. Thus we have Jeroboam (4 bottles), Methuselah (8 bottles), Balthazar (16 bottles), Nebuchadnezzar (20 bottles) etc. Other names are of less obvious origin but are French sounding

words such as Fillette (½ bottle) and Primat (36 bottles). The new size will be approximately ¾ of a standard bottle and perhaps, should have a British name to reflect its unique area of distribution. Thus we could have the Albion, the St George, the Milton (or even the Keynes). We could reference the other UK nations, with whom the English are on very good terms at the moment. Thus we could have the Glendower, the Bruce, the Ossian, the Wallace etc (but we probably won't). If we wanted to go down the Biblical route we should perhaps reference a more minor character given the modest size of the bottle. The name of Onan, second son of Judah, comes to mind as a tribute to our glorious politicians who came up with the stupid idea.

Cracking Scale Grommet!

Wallace and Grommet are something of a British institution and even people who consider cartoon films puerile nonsense will cheerfully watch the animated antics of the weird northern, turophilic, inventor and his much cleverer dog. The films are made by



Aardman Animations a Bristol based company who produce their work by a laborious stop motion method using figures made out of modelling clay. The method has been perfected over many years and an early product of the business was a character called Morph who originally appeared in children's television programmes back in the 1970's. He was a much simpler plasticine figure than the later, more elaborate characters but he was, by the magic of film, able change or 'morph' into other objects. All the antics of the Aardman characters are created frame by frame with the figures being moved slightly each time and photographed until a seamless animation is achieved. As Morph was made of clay he could not be kept between productions and had to be recreated each time he was

needed. In order to ensure consistency it was essential that the 'Morph' lump of clay be of identical size each time the figure was made. To achieve this, the artists decided they needed a scale to weigh the lump and they went out and bought one from a local junk shop. The scale in question was a little Salter Postal number as shown. Those versed in such matters will be able date it by the postal rates shown on the dial. As far as the



Aardman folk were concerned they were only interested in the weight of Morph so they marked the dial with a yellow dot and the letter M at the appropriate value of about 5½ ounces. As a rather macabre 'look-a-like' the dot on the dial reminds me of the clock above the entrance to Horse Guards Parade in Whitehall, London. There is a black mark on the dial at two-fifteen (ish) which is there to remind everybody that Charles 1 was beheaded, across the road at the

Banqueting House at 2.15 pm on 30th January 1649.

Holy Ground

The Nazca Plain in Peru is a mysterious place! It is famed for the so called Nazca Lines and the giant outlines of birds and other creatures drawn in the dry earth. These allegedly date back some 2000 years and were probably drawn by an ancient civilisation as religious tokens to please the Sky Gods. Alternatively they were drawn by alien visitors who, clearly had nothing better to do, after an interminable intergalactic voyage, than to visit a remote desert and draw a big spider.



Elsewhere, in the same part of the world there is another phenomenon called, rather prosaically the 'Band of Holes'. This is a mile long strip of some 5000 shallow pits, set out in a pattern guaranteed to really upset any trypophobia sufferer. This construction is also mysterious and its purpose was once, little understood. A current theory is that the holes date from the Inca civilisation and were actually constructed, as part of the tax system, as a means of collecting tribute. Payments would have been in the form of grain etc and the holes were actually a series of measuring pits built to contain the requisite contributions required from each community. The circular holes are about 1metre in diameter and up to a metre in depth. They are lined with stones and in a region of negligible rainfall they have survived pretty much intact to this day. We know that measuring holes for grain were used in ancient civilisations as a number of examples still exist. The Roman city of Leptis Magna in present day Libya has a fine example of a three holed stone block in which grain was measured (bottom left). In this case there is a hole at the base of each hole through which the grain could be released after measuring. Another example is found in the Swiss town of Gruyères (bottom right) which is of medieval origin. This town, in the Canton of Fribourg gives its name to the eponymous cheese (which takes us back to Wallace and Grommet).

